

Read: Daniel 1:3-21

Eat Your Vegetables!

Daniel 1:8-16

Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

If parents let their kids choose dinner every night, how many families would eat nothing but boxed macaroni-and-cheese and ice cream? That might sound like a great menu, but even the most noodle-loving kids will tell you that you've got to have more in your diet than pasta and frozen foods. You've got to eat your vegetables.

Daniel chose to eat vegetables for a different reason than a healthy diet. He ate them because, when he was living in Babylon, the king told him to eat foods that God had told his people not to eat. The Israelites were supposed to avoid eating "unclean" foods, and they were *definitely* supposed to avoid eating foods used in the worship of false gods. In Babylon, Daniel and his friends were asked to eat food that would dishonor God. So they refused. They asked for vegetables instead.

What a risky move! When Daniel said no to the king's diet, he could have lost his job, or even his life. But Daniel trusted in God to take care of him, because he knew that it was more important to honor God than it was to earn the approval of other human beings. For Daniel, honoring God meant eating his vegetables.

This wouldn't be the last time that Daniel and his friends would be challenged to make a choice: follow God or follow human beings. God commands us to follow both when we can. We are

called to honor our parents, our government, and anyone that God has placed in authority over us. But those in authority are people, and people are sinful, and sinful people can be wrong. When someone commands us to go against God's will, we only have one choice: to eat our vegetables. That is, to honor God with our choices, even if it's not the popular option.

Meanwhile, we learn from Daniel and his friends who faithfully served the government placed over them. We pray that our kings (or presidents, or members of congress, or teachers, or parents) on earth never go against what God says. He is King above all kings. What he says is the most important. Trust in him above everything else and remember... to eat your vegetables!

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- Why is it good to listen to our parents, our teachers, and our country's leaders?
- When is the only time that we are supposed to say "no" to our parents, our teachers, or our country's leaders?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- The Babylonians sometimes used food as a sacrifice to their false gods, then ate it afterward. That's the kind of food Daniel wanted to avoid eating. Why?
- God blessed Daniel's choice by giving him more health and strength than the people who were eating the royal food. Seeing how God worked in this story, what lesson do we learn for when we face a hard choice like Daniel did?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Maybe Daniel had another option: eat the unclean food when he was with the Babylonians, but don't eat it when other Israelites were around. Good idea or bad idea?
- Sometimes it can feel like we're in Babylon again: God's people living in a land where "rulers" don't honor him. What's an example of "eating our vegetables" today, where we must choose to obey God when those in authority are promoting sin?

Closing Prayer:

King of kings and Lord of lords, you are the ruler of my life, and your kingdom is the entire world. Help me to always be loyal to you in what I think, say, and do, even when it is unpopular or difficult. Amen.